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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

METHOD FOR DEBLOCKING AND TRANSCODING A MEDIA STREAM

Inventor:

Bo Shen

METHOD FOR DEBLOCKING AND TRANSCODING A MEDIA STREAM

TECHNICAL FIELD

Embodiments of the present invention relate to the field of digital media.

5 Specifically, embodiments of the present invention relate to a method and system for deblocking and transcoding a media stream.

BACKGROUND ART

One of the important video transcoding applications is bit rate reduction
10 transcoding. Rate reduction transcoding is typically achieved using either truncation based transcoding or by requantization-based transcoding. Selective coefficient truncating transcoding typically achieves a relatively small amount of bit rate reduction and is rarely used often in typical video transcoding applications.

15 Requantization-based transcoding achieves rate reduction by requantization using coarser quantization steps. Since the transform-domain coefficients are coarsely quantized, blocking artifacts may be produced. In particular, blocking artifacts arise as a result of each block being compressed independently. Blocking artifacts may appear as edges or produce ringing between blocks.

20 Numerous methods have been developed to reduce the blocking artifacts for decoded pixel blocks. Specifically, current deblocking applications typically decode the pixel blocks before deblocking and re-encode the pixel blocks after decoding. However, for transcoding applications, the decoding and re-encoding cycle may result
25 in increased blocking artifacts, as the decoding and re-encoding may rely on information that is not be available. Furthermore, due to the higher compression provided by transcoding applications, blocking artifacts get worse as the compression is increased. For example, requantization-based transcoding applies the

requantization on the transform-domain coefficients so that a costly inverse transformation is avoided. Currently, deblocking cannot be performed in conjunction with transcoding in the transform domain.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

Various embodiments of the present invention, a method for deblocking and transcoding a media stream, are described. A coefficient associated with a block of pixels of the media stream is received. A deblocking operation is performed on the
5 coefficient to generate a second coefficient. Quantization is performed on the second coefficient to generate a transcoded coefficient.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and form a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention:

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FIGURE 1 illustrates a block diagram of transcoding system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

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FIGURE 2 illustrates a graph of exemplary quantization bins for two quantizers in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

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FIGURE 3 illustrates a flow chart of a process for determining responsiveness of a coefficient of a media stream in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

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FIGURE 4 illustrates a flow chart of a process for determining responsiveness of a coefficient of a media stream using a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding to nearest in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

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FIGURE 5A illustrates a graph of an exemplary distribution of responsive and unresponsive coefficients using a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding to nearest in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 5B illustrates a graph of an exemplary distribution of responsive and unresponsive coefficients using a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding down in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 6 illustrates a block diagram of transcoding system for deblocking responsive coefficients in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

5 FIGURE 7 illustrates an exemplary quantization error table in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 8 illustrates a flow chart of a process for determining an optimal quantization step size in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

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BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Reference will now be made in detail to various embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. While the invention will be described in conjunction with these embodiments, it will be understood that they are not intended to limit the invention to these embodiments. On the contrary, the invention is intended to cover alternatives, modifications and equivalents, which may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims. Furthermore, in the following description of the present invention, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. In other instances, well-known methods, procedures, components, and circuits have not been described in detail as not to unnecessarily obscure aspects of the present invention.

Aspects of the present invention may be implemented in a computer system that includes, in general, a processor for processing information and instructions, random access (volatile) memory (RAM) for storing information and instructions, read-only (non-volatile) memory (ROM) for storing static information and instructions, a data storage device such as a magnetic or optical disk and disk drive for storing information and instructions, an optional user output device such as a display device (e.g., a monitor) for displaying information to the computer user, an optional user input device including alphanumeric and function keys (e.g., a keyboard) for communicating information and command selections to the processor, and an optional user input device such as a cursor control device (e.g., a mouse) for communicating user input information and command selections to the processor.

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR DEBLOCKING AND TRANSCODING A MEDIA STREAM

Figure 1 illustrates a block diagram of transcoding system 100 in accordance

with an embodiment of the present invention. Transcoding system 100 utilizes requantization for bit rate reduction transcoding and has deblocking capability.

Transcoding system 100 comprises three modules: inverse quantizer 105, deblocking mechanism 110, and transcoder 115. It should be appreciated that transcoding system
5 100 may be implemented within a computer system.

Transcoding system 100 receives a coefficient associated with a block of pixels of a media stream. Embodiments of the present invention pertain to media stream for transmitting graphical data, such as video streams. For brevity and clarity, the term
10 video stream is used in the present application. In one embodiment, the coefficient is a quantized coefficient C_q . In one embodiment, quantized coefficient C_q is received from a compressed video stream. In one embodiment, quantized coefficient C_q is a discrete cosine transform (DCT) coefficient.

Inverse quantizer 105 is operable to perform an inverse quantization operation (Q_1^{-1}) on quantized coefficient C_q using quantization step size s_1 . Inverse quantizer 105 outputs dequantized coefficient C . It should be appreciated that the accuracy of dequantized coefficient C may not be known because information of the original coefficient may be unavailable. Since it is a lossy reconstruction, dequantized
15 coefficient C may bring blocking artifacts to the reconstructed picture. It should also be appreciated that embodiments of the invention may not require inverse quantizer 105 where the coefficient received at transcoding system 100 is already dequantized.
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Deblocking mechanism 110 is operable to perform a deblocking operation on dequantized coefficient C . In one embodiment, a DCT domain deblocking operation is
25 performed to obtain a second coefficient C' . DCT domain deblocking operations modify DCT coefficients depending on the neighboring coefficients in the subbands. It should be appreciated that DCT domain deblocking operations are understood in

the art. An example of a DCT domain deblocking operation is described in Triantafyllidis et al., "Blocking Artifact Reduction in Frequency Domain," *Proc. ICIP2001*, pp 269-272, 2001, which is incorporated herein by reference as background material.

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Transcoder 115 is operable to requantize second coefficient C' using quantization step size s_2 , resulting in transcoded coefficient C_q' (e.g., a re-quantized coefficient). In one embodiment, quantization step size s_2 is produced by a rate control module of transcoder 115 that regulates the bit budget spent for each macroblock depending on a block complexity measure and current bit-consumption status. In one embodiment, quantization step size s_2 is less than quantization step size s_1 . Therefore, transcoded coefficient C_q' is less than or equal to quantized coefficient C_q , possibly requiring a fewer number of bits to code transcoded coefficient C_q' . Bit rate reduction is thus achieved.

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It should be understood that in video transcoding, coefficients modified after a deblocking operation are still subject to transcoding (e.g., re-quantization) that may render the deblocking modification ineffective. In particular, some coefficients may be responsive to a deblocking operation while other coefficients may be unresponsive to a deblocking operation.

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Embodiments of the invention are directed towards determining whether a coefficient is responsive to deblocking in order to accelerate the deblocking operation in transcoding. Figure 2 is an example illustrating that some coefficients may be responsive to a deblocking operation while other coefficients may be unresponsive to a deblocking operation. Specifically, Figure 2 illustrates a graph 200 of exemplary quantization bins for two quantizers in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment, quantizer Q_1 and quantizer Q_2 are both uniform scalar

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quantizers, Graph 200 illustrates two different sets of bins generated with two different quantization steps. The original quantization step size for quantizer Q_1 is quantization step size s_1 and the transcoding step size for quantizer Q_2 is quantization step size s_2 .

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For illustrative purposes, if an input coefficient falls into bin a of quantizer Q_1 , the reconstructed coefficient is represented by the middle value of bin a , as represented by the arrow. After deblocking, the adjusted coefficient can vary within the range of bin a . Consequently, the requantization result can fall either in bin A or bin B of quantizer Q_2 . If a post-deblocking coefficient may end up in different bins of Q_2 , the coefficient is responsive to deblocking. Alternatively, if an input coefficient falls into bin a' , the post-deblocking coefficient always falls into bin C regardless of how the deblocking process alters a' since the whole range of a' is within C. The input coefficient is unresponsive to deblocking. Therefore, for unresponsive

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coefficients, no deblocking operation need be applied on them, as deblocking is ineffective.

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The value of the unresponsive coefficients can be derived as follows given the quantizer function f , quantization steps s_1 and s_2 . Assuming a uniform scale quantizer with rounding to nearest, the inverse quantization function f^{-1} is considered. Given an

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input DCT coefficient (a quantized DCT coefficient) $C_q=n$, the reconstructed coefficient is $C_n = f^{-1}(C_q, s) = ns$, where s is the quantization step size. The quantization lower bound of C_n is defined as:

$$C_n^L = ns - \lfloor s/2 \rfloor \quad (1)$$

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and the upper bound is defined as:

$$C_n^U = ns - \lfloor s/2 \rfloor + s - 1 \quad (2)$$

Note that the round-to-nearest quantizing (values at 0.5 are rounded to the larger magnitude) leads to the round-down term in Equations (1) and (2). Let i that belongs to C_q , the set of input coefficients, and j that belongs to C_q' , the set of coefficients after requantization, C_q and C_q' are subsets of integers, from Equations (1) and (2) results in:

$$\begin{aligned} C_i^L &= is_1 - \lfloor s_1/2 \rfloor, \quad C_i^U = is_1 - \lfloor s_1/2 \rfloor + s_1 - 1 \\ C_j^L &= js_2 - \lfloor s_2/2 \rfloor, \quad C_j^U = js_2 - \lfloor s_2/2 \rfloor + s_2 - 1 \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

The set of unresponsive coefficients is defined as:

$$U = \left\{ i \mid \forall i, j \in \text{int}, C_i^L \geq C_j^L \text{ and } C_i^U \leq C_j^U \right\} \quad (4)$$

Plugging Equation (3) into the condition items in Equation (4) and noting that $\lfloor s/2 \rfloor + \lfloor s/2 \rfloor = s$, a quantization theorem is derived. Specifically, for a uniform scalar quantizer (round-to-nearest quantizing), given first quantizer step size s_1 and requantizer step size s_2 , the magnitude of unresponsive coefficients i that belongs to C_q , satisfies:

$$\left(js_2 - \left\lfloor \frac{s_2}{2} \right\rfloor + \left\lfloor \frac{s_1}{2} \right\rfloor \right) / s_1 < i < \left(js_2 + \left\lfloor \frac{s_2}{2} \right\rfloor - \left\lfloor \frac{s_1}{2} \right\rfloor \right) / s_1 \quad (5)$$

and the magnitude of the responsive coefficients i' fall into the intervals defined by:

$$\left(js_2 + \left\lfloor \frac{s_2}{2} \right\rfloor - \left\lfloor \frac{s_1}{2} \right\rfloor \right) / s_1 < i' < \left(js_2 + \left\lfloor \frac{s_2}{2} \right\rfloor + \left\lfloor \frac{s_1}{2} \right\rfloor \right) / s_1 \quad (6)$$

where j belongs to C_q '.

Alternatively, if round-down instead of round-to-nearest is considered in
5 quantizing, the intervals for responsive coefficients become:

$$\frac{s_1}{s_2}(j+1) - 1 < i' < \frac{s_1}{s_2}(j+1) \quad (7)$$

Equation (7) considers a round-down scheme with uniform scalar quantizer only. It
should be appreciated that other scalar quantizers can be used. For example, a round-
10 down scheme with dead zone quantizer (for quantization of inter pictures in MPEG)
can be evaluated similarly.

In general, given any (s_1, s_2) pair, a coefficient responsiveness table for
recording responsive or unresponsive coefficients for a range of coefficients can be
15 obtained according to a quantization operation (e.g., quantization function f). For
example, if the quantized coefficients are obtained from an MPEG-2 video stream, the
range $R=[0,1024]$. It should be appreciated that the range depends on media stream
encoding, such as MPEG, H.26x, and JPEG.

20 In one embodiment, the quantization operation is a uniform scalar quantizer
with rounding to nearest as shown in Equation (6). In another embodiment, the
quantization operation is a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding down as shown in
Equation (7). For ease of explanation, the left side of Equations (6) and (7) is denoted
as L_j and right side is denoted as U_j . For both Equations (6) and (7), it can be proven
25 that $L_j - U_j = 1$. In other words, there is at most one responsive coefficient in each
interval. Therefore, Equations (6) and (7) can be used to generate a coefficient

responsiveness table indicating the responsiveness for a coefficient.

Figure 3 illustrates a flow chart of a process 300 for determining responsiveness of a coefficient of a media stream in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment, process 300 is carried out by processors and electrical components (e.g., a computer system) under the control of computer readable and computer executable instructions. Although specific steps are disclosed in process 300, such steps are exemplary. That is, the embodiments of the present invention are well suited to performing various other steps or variations of the steps recited in Figure 3.

At step 310, a plurality of first coefficients and a plurality of second coefficients associated with plurality of blocks of pixels, a first quantization step size, a second quantization step size, and a quantization operation are received. In one embodiment, the plurality of first coefficients are quantized coefficients and the plurality of second coefficients are transcoded coefficients. In one embodiment, the quantization operation is a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding to nearest. In another embodiment, the quantization operation is a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding down.

At step 320, the quantization operation is performed for a first coefficient of the plurality of first coefficients and a second coefficient of the plurality of second coefficients. The quantization operation utilizes the first quantization step size, the second quantization step size and the second coefficient. In one embodiment, the quantization operation determines whether the first coefficient falls within an interval defined by the first quantization step size, the second quantization step size and the second coefficient.

At step 330, it is determined whether the first coefficient is responsive based on the quantization operation. In one embodiment, if the coefficient falls within an interval as defined by the quantization operation, the first coefficient is identified as being responsive. Alternatively, if the coefficient does not fall within the interval as defined by the quantization operation, the first coefficient is identified as being unresponsive. In one embodiment, the quantization operation defines a lower bound and an upper bound. Based on the first quantization step size, the second quantization step size and the second coefficient, the lower bound and upper bound are determined. If lower bound is less than the first coefficient and the upper bound is greater than the first coefficient, the first coefficient is indicated as responsive.

At step 340, it is determined whether more coefficients require processing by the quantization operation. In one embodiment, it is determined whether the quantization operation has been performed on every combination of first coefficients of the plurality of first coefficients and second coefficients of the plurality of second coefficients. If there are more coefficients that require processing by the quantization operation, process 300 returns to step 320 with the next combination of first coefficients and second coefficients. Alternatively, if there are no more coefficients that require processing by the quantization operation, process 300 proceeds to step 350.

At step 350, a coefficient responsiveness table is generated comprising a distribution of responsiveness of the plurality of first coefficients for the first quantization step size. A first axis of the coefficient responsiveness table corresponds to the plurality of first coefficients and the second axis corresponds to the second quantization step size. It should be appreciated that the coefficient responsiveness table can be generated prior to the completion of step 340. That is, the coefficient responsiveness table can be generated one coefficient at a time, such

that once responsiveness of a first coefficient is determined at step 330, the responsiveness is indicated in the coefficient responsiveness table.

Figure 4 illustrates a flow chart of a process 400 for determining
5 responsiveness of a coefficient of a media stream using a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding to nearest in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment, process 400 is carried out by processors and electrical components (e.g., a computer system) under the control of computer readable and computer executable instructions. Although specific steps are disclosed in process 400, such
10 steps are exemplary. That is, the embodiments of the present invention are well suited to performing various other steps or variations of the steps recited in Figure 4.

At step 402 of Figure 4, all possible quantized coefficients are set as unresponsive. At step 404, L_j (e.g., the right side of Equation (6)) and U_j (e.g., the left
15 side of Equation (6)) are determined starting from the first interval where a transcoded coefficient of a plurality of transcoded coefficients is set equal to one (e.g., $j=1$). At step 406, the first possible quantized coefficient of the plurality of quantized coefficients is set equal to one (e.g., $i=1$).

20 At step 408, it is determined whether Equation (6) is satisfied for the quantized coefficient. In other words, it is determined whether the quantized coefficient falls within the interval of L_j and U_j . If the quantized coefficient falls within the interval of L_j and U_j , as shown at step 410, the quantized coefficient is set as responsive, and process 400 proceeds to step 412. Alternatively, if the quantized
25 coefficient does not fall within the interval of L_j and U_j process 400 proceeds to step 412.

At step 412 it is determined whether all values of quantized coefficients have

been processed at step 408. If all values of quantized coefficients have not been processed, as shown at step 414, the next possible quantized coefficient is selected and process 400 proceeds to step 408. Alternatively, if all values of quantized coefficients have been processed, process 400 proceeds to step 416.

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At step 416 it is determined whether all intervals of L_j and U_j have been processed at step 408. If all intervals have not been processed, as shown at step 418, the next possible transcoded coefficient is selected and process 400 proceeds to step 408. Alternatively, if all intervals have been processed, process 400 proceeds to step 420. At step 420, process 400 ends.

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Figure 5A illustrates a graph 500 of an exemplary distribution of responsive and unresponsive coefficients using a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding to nearest in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Graph 500 shows the actual distribution of responsive and unresponsive coefficients for an MPEG-2 video stream with a first quantization step size of three ($s_1=3$). The vertical axis indicates the second quantization step size s_2 which ranges from 1-31 in the case of MPEG-2 video streams, and the horizontal axis indicates the quantized coefficient C_q (e.g., first coefficient), which ranges from 1-1024 in the case of MPEG-2 video streams. For simplicity, graph 200 only illustrates the first 30 quantized coefficients. As shown, 'o' indicates a responsive coefficient and 'x' indicates an unresponsive coefficient. Also, since the second quantization step size is greater than the first quantization step size, it should be understood that the responsiveness is only determined for second quantization step size from four through thirty-one. In one embodiment, graph 500 is generated for each first quantization step size. However, it should be appreciated that a three-dimensional table can be generated that includes all first quantization step sizes, second quantization step sizes, and quantized coefficients.

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Figure 5B illustrates a graph 510 of an exemplary distribution of responsive and unresponsive coefficients using a uniform scalar quantizer with rounding down in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Graph 510 is generated in a manner similar to graph 500 of Figure 5A, and is for an MPEG-2 video stream having a first quantization step size of three. Due to the different quantizer used, the responsiveness of coefficients is different than the quantizer used at graph 500.

It should be appreciated that second quantization step size s_2 is typically no smaller than first quantization step size s_1 . Thus, the transcoded coefficient is smaller than the input quantized coefficient. In bit rate reduction transcoding, for any given i that belongs to C_q , after deblocking there are at most two possible requantization outputs. Using this information, a deblocking capable transcoder can be implemented that only performs a deblocking operation on responsive coefficients, thus facilitating efficient throughput of input coefficients.

Figure 6 illustrates a block diagram of transcoding system 600 for deblocking responsive coefficients in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Transcoding system 600 utilizes requantization for bit rate reduction transcoding and has deblocking capability. Transcoding system 600 comprises inverse quantizer 605, coefficient responsiveness table 610, responsiveness selector 620, deblocking mechanism 610, and transcoder 615. It should be appreciated that transcoding system 600 may be implemented within a computer system.

Transcoding system 600 receives a coefficient associated with a block of pixels of a media stream. In one embodiment, the coefficient is a quantized coefficient C_q . In one embodiment, quantized coefficient C_q is received from a compressed video stream. In one embodiment, quantized coefficient C_q is a discrete cosine transform

(DCT) coefficient. Inverse quantizer 605 is operable to perform an inverse quantization operation (Q_1^{-1}) on quantized coefficient C_q using quantization step size s_1 . Inverse quantizer 605 outputs dequantized coefficient C . In one embodiment, inverse quantizer operates in the same manner as inverse quantizer 105 of Figure 1.

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Dequantized coefficient C is transmitted to transcoder 615. Transcoder 615 is operable to perform a transcoding (e.g., quantization) operation (Q_2) on dequantized coefficient C using quantization step size s_2 . Transcoder 615 outputs transcoded coefficient C_q' . In one embodiment, transcoder 615 operates in the same manner as transcoder 115 of Figure 1.

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Responsiveness selector 630 performs a table-lookup operation using quantized coefficient C_q as an input, as well as quantization step sizes s_1 and s_2 . In one embodiment, the table lookup operation is based on coefficient responsiveness table 620 which is generated beforehand. In one embodiment, coefficient responsiveness table 620 is generated as described at process 300 of Figure 3 or process 400 of Figure 4. Based on quantization step size s_2 proposed by a rate control module, an input coefficient i is mapped to a corresponding C_q' of coefficient responsiveness table 620.

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Responsiveness selector 630 performs a table-lookup operation and the output of 630 is used to control a switch arrow 635. If i that belongs to C_q is unresponsive according to coefficient responsiveness table 620, switch arrow 635 is connected to unresponsive node 640, transcoded coefficient C_q' is output.

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Alternatively, if i is responsive according to coefficient responsiveness table 620, switch arrow 635 is connected to responsive node 645. Subsequently, a deblocking process of deblocking mechanism 610 is applied on the transcoded coefficient C_q' according to dequantized coefficient C . Transcoded coefficient C_q' is modified by ± 1 or zero, and is output as C_q'' . In one embodiment, deblocking mechanism 610

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operates in the same manner as deblocking mechanism 110 of Figure 1. In one embodiment, a memory unit of transcoding system 600 is used to pass dequantized coefficient C to deblocking mechanism 610.

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METHOD FOR DETERMINING AN OPTIMAL QUANTIZATION STEP SIZE FOR TRANSCODING A MEDIA STREAM

10 If quantization step size s_1 is small, there is typically minimal blocking introduced into the video stream. However, if quantization step size s_2 is much greater than quantization step size s_1 , there may be substantial blocking artifacts introduced. The distribution of responsive coefficients may become sparse with increasing quantization step size s_2 . Noting that the interval between the lower and

15 upper bounds in Equation (5) equals $s_2/s_1 - 1$, the following corollary can be derived. In general, for a uniform scalar quantizer, given first quantization step size s_1 and second quantization step size s_2 , the number of unresponsive coefficients increases when s_2/s_1 increases. This corollary indicates that a deblocking operation has limited impact

20 when requantization is much more coarser. In some special cases, no responsive coefficients are available at all. Note from the example shown in Figure 5A that when $s_2=9$, no coefficients are responsive.

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In general, for a uniform scalar quantizer, given first quantization step size s_1 and second quantization step size s_2 , if

$$s_2 = \begin{cases} (2k+1)s_1, & \text{round - to - nearest} \\ ks_1, & \text{round - down} \end{cases} \quad (8)$$

where $k = (1, 2, \dots)$, there are no responsive coefficients.

It is therefore important to avoid choosing second quantization step size s_2 as in Equation (8) if a deblocking-capable transcoder is desired. From the example shown in Figure 5A, there are more responsive coefficients when second quantization step size $s_2=8$ or 10. Therefore, by altering the selection of second quantization step size s_2 , the number of responsive coefficients may increase so that the deblocking can be more effective.

In one embodiment, a bigger or smaller quantization step size in the vicinity of quantization step size s_2 is selected, leading to possibly more responsive coefficients. To select an appropriate quantization step size, a plot of quantization error is generated. In one embodiment, the quantization error is plotted based on standard TM5 quantization procedure employed in the MPEG standard. Given the range of quantization step size s_2 from 1 to 31, and possible magnitudes of DCT coefficients from 0 to 2048, a quantization error table containing all possible quantization errors for each (s_2, C_q) pair can be generated.

Figure 7 illustrates an exemplary quantization error table 700 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Specifically, quantization error table 700 shows the quantization error for DCT coefficients for values from 0 to 1028 using the MPEG standard. For simplicity, only the first 64 coefficients are shown. The quantizer function and the default intra quantizer matrix used in MPEG are considered here. The visualization of the table only shows the results for the (0,1), (1,0) and (1,1) coefficients (the value of these entries in the default quantizer matrix is 16). The troughs (darker cells) indicate smaller quantization error. For a vertical line (for example the vertical line for coefficient value at 40) in Figure 7, multiple troughs are encountered, which indicates that a higher quantization step size s_2 value does not necessarily increase the quantization error. On the contrary, if quantization step size

s_2 is selected carefully, the quantization error may be maintained or even reduced.

The quantization property described above proves valuable for the deblocking-capable transcoder. An optimal quantization step size s_2 can be selected to boost the number of responsive coefficients so that the deblocking mechanism (e.g., deblocking mechanism 110 of Figure 1 or deblocking mechanism 610 of Figure 6) can be more effective. Furthermore, the altered quantization step size maintains the bit rate and the quality of the coded pictures. Based on this, a deblocking-capable transcoder can be implemented with enhanced deblocking capability. The enhanced deblocking capability can be implemented in transcoding system 100 of Figure 1 and transcoding system 600 of Figure 6 by selecting an optimal second quantization step size s_2 .

Figure 8 illustrates a flow chart of a process 800 for determining an optimal quantization step size in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment, process 800 is carried out by processors and electrical components (e.g., a computer system) under the control of computer readable and computer executable instructions. Although specific steps are disclosed in process 800, such steps are exemplary. That is, the embodiments of the present invention are well suited to performing various other steps or variations of the steps recited in Figure 8.

At step 810, an input quantization step size and a plurality of coefficients of a macroblock are received. In one embodiment, an input quantization step size and a plurality of coefficients are received for a group of blocks (e.g., in the case of JPEG encoding).

At step 820, a magnitude distribution of non-zero coefficients of the plurality of coefficients is determined.

At step 830, a plurality of candidate quantization step sizes is determined based on a first table. In one embodiment, the first table is a quantization error table.

5 At step 840, a quantization error for a range of quantization step sizes including the input quantization step size is determined. In one embodiment, the range of quantization step sizes comprises all quantization step sizes between the input quantization step size plus three and the input quantization step size minus three. In other words, for quantization step size s_2 , the range of quantization step sizes ranges from s_2-3 to s_2+3

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At step 850, a plurality of candidate quantization step sizes from is selected form the range of quantization step sizes. In one embodiment, the plurality of candidate quantization step sizes produce a quantization error not greater than quantization error associated with the input quantization step size.

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At step 860, the optimal quantization step size is determined from said plurality of quantization step sizes based on a second table. In one embodiment, the second table is a coefficient responsiveness table. In one embodiment, the optimal quantization step size is selected as a quantization step size of plurality of quantization step sizes that has the highest number of responsive coefficients according to the coefficient responsiveness table.

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It should be appreciated that in the case of MPEG, one quantization step size s_2 is applied to the quantization of 6 to 12 blocks in a macroblock. The distribution of non-zero coefficients is obtained considering all the blocks. Weighting factors can be assigned to coefficients at different frequencies based on their importance to the reconstruction quality. In one embodiment, using the lower frequency coefficients

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(e.g., coefficients in the upper left 2x2 in a block) can be implemented.

5 Various embodiments of the present invention provide an analytical model for identifying transform coefficients that are responsive to deblocking in a video transcoding process. A method that enables a transcoder to avoid unnecessary deblocking operations in the transcoding process is provided. An optimal quantizer selection method is also provided to increase the number of responsive coefficients so that the deblocking capability of the transcoder is enhanced.

10 Embodiments of the present invention, a method for deblocking and transcoding a media stream, are thus described. While the present invention has been described in particular embodiments, it should be appreciated that the present invention should not be construed as limited by such embodiments, but rather construed according to the following claims.